

Help for Busy Dogs

Positive ways to channel your active, intelligent dog's energy.

By Liz Palika; Illustration by Thomas Kimball

Walter is a busy dog. The 5-year-old Cocker Spaniel and Poodle cross' dark, expressive eyes, dancing feet and constantly wagging tail betray his personality. Kate Abbott, Walter's owner, says, "If I don't keep Walter physically and mentally tired, he's going to find something to do to amuse himself, and I have learned through experience that I won't appreciate his efforts!"

Abbott, a dog trainer, defines a busy dog as, "A dog [that is] mentally bright and physically active with more energy than the average dog."

A good example is a German Shepherd Dog named Watachie who began chewing at 4 months of age. He learned to chew the corner off a sofa cushion so he could pull the stuffing out and fling it all over the living room. But because he chewed such a tiny hole in the cushion cover, Watachie's owner had no idea where the stuffing was coming from until the cushion was quite depleted. Meanwhile, Watachie had great fun. Every time his owner left the room, he pulled more stuffing out and flung it all over. It became a self-rewarding behavior that Watachie used for amusement.

Changing dog and owner behavior

Yelling, using a leash to make corrections or correcting dogs by other means will not solve the problems associated with these intelligent and energetic canines. Instead, owners of busy dogs need to first look with an unbiased eye at their relationship with the dog and then begin making changes.

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